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AUTHOR Borges, Marilyn A.; Clothier, Tamara A.
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ABSTRACT

Women and men tend to be defined by their marital and parental status; thus, these factors may be crucial in understanding societal attitudes toward working men and women. The influence of marital and parental status on perceived job performance was investigated with a college undergraduate sample (N=128). From paragraph descriptions that varied gender, marital status, and parental status systematically, raters indicated that they expected women would be absent more than men, singles would be paid more than marrieds, and parents would be paid more and be absent more, but would be on the job longer than non-parents. The overall quality of job performance was judged highest for married men with or without a dependent child, next highest for single men with a dependent child, third highest for married women without a dependent child, and lowest for all women with a dependent child. The findings suggest that differences in sex-role stereotypic attitudes toward working men and women may not be a function of gender, but may result from differential expectations of job performance between the sexes that are associated with marital and parental status. (Author/JAC)

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Estimates of Job Performance for Applicants Differing in Gender, Marital and Parental Status

Marilyn A. Borges and Tamara A. Clothier

San Diego State University

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Running head: Estimates of Applicants' Job Performances

Estimates of Job Performance for Applicants Differing in Gender, Marital and Parental Status

Gilmer (1971) has suggested that married women have home and job responsibilities different from those of married men. They may have added a career role but have difficulty shedding the stereotypic role of housewife and mother. Furthermore, according to Oppenheimer (1968) women with marital and parental responsibilities are viewed by employers as lacking three characteristics when compared to men: (a) career continuity; (b) geographical mobility; and (c) career commitment.

Terborg and Ilgen (1975) have shown that a female was hired as frequently as a male, but she was offered a significantly lower starting salary plus a subsequent raise further increased the initial difference in male and female salaries. These lower salaries are often justified on the basis that women as a group are less likely to provide a return on the company's recruitment and training costs because women terminate employment sooner than men (Terborg, 1977). Terborg points out that women do not take more sick leave or terminate employment sooner than men and, even if they did, the reason may reside in the lower salaries women are paid.

Rosen and Jerdee (1974a) have indicated that it is appropriate for a female and not a male to ask for a leave of absence without salary to care for small children. Also, in another study, married male applicants were evaluated more favorably on overall ratings of

general stability, potential for long service and potential for fitting well in the organization than married female applicants (Rosen & Jerdee, 1974b).

In the above mentioned studies marital status and parental status were not considered as independent factors which may influence sex-specific job performance expectations. It is the contention of this study that women and men are not viewed solely on the basis of being female or male, but are viewed in conjunction with the various roles assigned to being female or male. In particular, are the roles of spouse and parent. Russo (1979) notes that "both sexes must deal with society's reproductic ethic" (p. 8): women must manage the multiple roles of mother and worker (violating society's definition of good motherhood), and men must deal with the conflict between roles of good provider and serving their children's needs. In a society which defines women and men by their marital and parental status these factors may be crucial in understanding society's attitudes toward working women and men.

The purpose of the present laboratory study was to explore the influence marital and parental status may have on perceived job performance. How will being single or married and/or being a parent or not being a parent influence such factors as salary, absenteeism rates, turnover rates and quality of job performance for female and male applicants?

Method

Subjects

A total of 128 (64 female, 64 male) psychology undergraduates from San Diego State University were participants in this study.

Design and Procedure

Paragraph Judgments. Subjects were first asked to read a paragraph describing an applicant who had recently been accepted for a job. Each paragraph systematically varied sex of applicant, marital status (single or married) and parental status (no children or one child). The applicant's age, previous experience and qualifications were held constant. Eight job positions were used and were selected on the basis of same relevant position in the organization hierarchy.

A totally between-subjects 2 x 2 x 2 x 2 (sex of subject by sex of applicant by marital status by parental status) design was used. Each of the eight job positions occurred in each combination of applicant and subject conditions. Each subject received only one paragraph and presumably was unaware that other versions existed. One such paragraph appeared as follows:

> The position for Personnel Manager for a large company was filled by _____. She is 25 years old and presently unmarried with no dependent children. She has had experience with this position and is fully qualified for the job.

After reading the paragraph information on the applicant, each subject estimated the new employee's annual salary, the number of days he/she would be

absent annually from work due to illness or injury, and the number of years the applicant would be likely to work in this particular position before quitting.

Job Performance Questionnaire. After completion of the paragraph judgments, each subject completed an eight-item questionnaire on which he/she judged the overall quality of job performance of a single male applicant and a single female applicant; the degree to which "marriage" and "having a dependent child" would affect the quality of job performance for a single male and a single female applicant; the degree to which "having a dependent child" would affect the quality of job performance of a married male and a married female applicant.

Evaluation of job performances for single male and female applicants were marked on a six-point scale ranging from (1) poor to (6) excellent. Evaluations of job performance as a function of change in marital/parental status were marked on a six-point scale ranging from (1) greatly decrease to (6) greatly improve. Each subject evaluated all conditions. Half of the subjects evaluated male then female applicants, and the other half evaluated female then male applicants.

For evaluation of job performance as a function of change in marital/parental status, a 2 x 2 x 3 mixed design was used with sex of subject as a between-subject variable; sex of applicant and change in marital-parental status of applicant (single becoming married, single acquiring a dependent child, married acquiring a dependent child) as within-subject variables. The dependent variable was the estimated change in quality of job performance.

With both questionnaires the subjects were told to put down the answers that they felt were appropriate and that there were no right or wrong answers. Upon completion of both questionnaires, the subjects were debriefed as to the purpose of the study.

Results

Paragraph Judgments. Each subject estimated their applicant's salary level, rate of absenteeism and length of stay on the job.

An analysis of variance on salary estimates indicated that a higher mean salary was assigned to singles ($12,220) than to marrieds ($10,660) [$F(1, 112) = 9.47$, $p < .01$], and to applicants with a child ($12,120) than those without a dependent child ($10,760) [$F(1, 112) = 7.33$, $p < .01$]. Sex of subject and sex of applicant did not significantly affect salary estimates, nor did any interactions.

An analysis of variance on the absentee data indicated that female applicants (7.0 days) were assigned a higher mean number of days absent per year than were male applicants (5.3 days) [$F(1, 112) = 4.06$, $p < .05$]. Also, there was a significant interaction between marital status and parental status [$F(1, 112) = 5.31$, $p < .05$]. A Newman-Kuels test on the interaction means indicated that marrieds without a child were expected to be absent less (4.2 days) than singles with and without a child, and marrieds with a child, (6.3; 6.8; 6.7 days, respectively) $p < .05$.

A third analysis of variance indicated that the expected length of stay on the job before quitting was longer for applicants with a child (5.6 yrs) than for those without a child (3.7 yrs) [$F(1, 112) = 5.87$, $p < .05$].

All other main effects and interactions were not significant.

Job Performance Questionnaire. Each subject rated the effects they believed marriage and responsibility for a child would have on females' and males' overall job performance.

An analysis of variance on overall job performance ratings assigned to single applicants showed that females (5.05) were expected to have a slightly higher quality of job performance than males (4.93), [$F(1, 126) = 4.50$ $p < .05$]. However, on a 6-point scale, the one-tenth difference in ratings between males and females is not particularly meaningful.

An analysis of variance on the estimated changes in job performance due to marriage and parental status changes showed the following results: (a) there were no significant differences in ratings made between male and female raters; (b) overall, male applicants were judged to be more positively affected by additional marriage and child responsibilities than were female applicants [$F(1, 126) = 65.32$, $p < .01$]; (c) overall, the particular type of marital and/or parental status change affected the job performance ratings [$F(2, 252) = 13.55$, $p < .01$]; (d) ratings of job performance changes due to new marital and parental statuses differed depending upon sex of applicant--interaction of (b) and (c) above [$F(2, 252) = 6.36$, $p < .01$]. All other interactions were not significant.

A Newman-Keuls test on the six interaction means of status change by sex of applicant indicated that the quality of job performance was expected to improve most for a single man becoming married, and for a married man becoming a parent; less for a single man becoming a parent, and a single woman becoming married; least for a single or a married woman becoming a parent (see Figure 1), $p < .05$.

Insert Figure 1 about here.

Discussion

An interaction was expected between sex of applicant and marital and/or parental status on ratings of job performance which conform to traditional sex-role attitudes toward working women and men. Results indicated that the job questionnaire data but not the paragraph data supported this expectation.

The results of the paragraph judgments revealed that marital and parental status influenced assignment of salary, absenteeism and turnover rates but not along stereotypic sex-role lines as expected. Parents, regardless of gender, were expected to be paid more, to be absent more, and to stay at their jobs longer before quitting then non-parents. It appears that subjects recognized the additional needs parents have in terms of an increased financial burden, time away from the job, and long-term job commitment.

Surprisingly, subjects in this study expected singles to be paid more than marrieds. There are two possible explanations: (a) Subjects were college students and most likely single themselves. Thus, they may have rewarded their own single status with a higher salary (although they didn't reward their own sex with higher salaries); (b) Today many husbands and wives are both working and combining their salaries, particularly among young educated adults. Thus, the subjects may have felt that a higher salary was necessary for singles trying to maintain a household on their own.

Both male and female subjects expected women, regardless of marital or parental status, to be absent more than men. Stereotypically, women are considered physically and emotionally weaker than men and thus apt to call in sick more frequently. In reality, a Public Health Service Study (U. S. Department of Labor, 1974) revealed that the absentee rate per year for women (5.6 days) is little different from that for men (5.2 days).

The above results disagree with two previous studies. Firstly, female applicants were not assigned lower salaries than male applicants as in the Terborg and Ilgen (1975) study. This result may have occurred because subjects in the present study were not required to make a decision as to hiring an applicant and making a salary offer. The applicant was already hired, and the subject was asked what she/he expected this individual to earn. This suggests that individuals in decisional positions concerning applicants (i.e., managers) may be more likely to use sex-role stereotypes when making personnel decisions than individuals in non-decisional roles.

Secondly, Rosen and Jerdee (1974b) reported that females were rated lower than males on "potential for long service to the organization." The present study found no difference in female and male length of stay on the job. Again, this may have occurred because the subjects were not in a position of responsibility concerning the applicant.

The results from the estimated changes in job performance questionnaire, however, indicated that the job performance of applicants as a function of marital and parental status was differentially affected by gender. Although there was little difference in the ratings of overall job performances of single males and females, both marriage and responsibility for a dependent child was expected to <u>improve</u> a male's overall job performance. At the other extreme, parental responsibility had <u>no</u> positive effect on a female's job performance, regardless of her marital status. Only somewhat positively affected was the job performance of single males who became responsible for a dependent child and a single female who married. Thus, a married or single male's job performance was rated higher when he had a dependent child, while the single or married

female's was not. This combined with the finding that both married and single females with dependent children were evaluated equally non-positively reveals that even college students perceive child care as resting solely with the female.

As noted above, there are apparent contradictions between the results of the two rating procedures. On assigning salaries to applicants described by paragraphs, singles were expected to be paid more than marrieds, with no differentiation between males or females, while job performance was expected to be greatest for married males with dependent children, and least for women with dependent children. Two possible interpretations are suggested. First, college students do expect marriage and children to differentially affect job performance, but do not believe that applicants should be differentially paid because of it. While this may follow from a belief in a "Just World", it demonstrates considerable naivete as to normal business practices.

Alternatively, and more likely, stereotypic beliefs may not occur when individuals are judged singly (as in the paragraph judgments), but occur when comparative evaluations must be made between individuals who differ only in sex, marital and parental status. As Rosen and Jerdee (1974a) have suggested, when only partial information is available, subjects may provide more information for themselves by filling in sex-role stereotypes, their own prejudices or widely held societal expectations.

In summary, results from this study suggest that (a) differences in attitudes toward working women and men which are usually described as sex-role stereotypic, may not be a function of gender differences per se, but may actually result from differential expectations of job performance between the

sexes which are associated with their marital and parental status; (b) although stereotypic judgments concerning the effects of sex, marital, and parental status on job performance may not be evident when a person rates a job applicant individually, the same person may use such prejudicial factors when forced to make decisions or comparisons between applicants.

If women are ever to compete equally with men in the job market, it may be necessary to alert employers about marital and parental stereotypes, in addition to the more common gender stereotypes.

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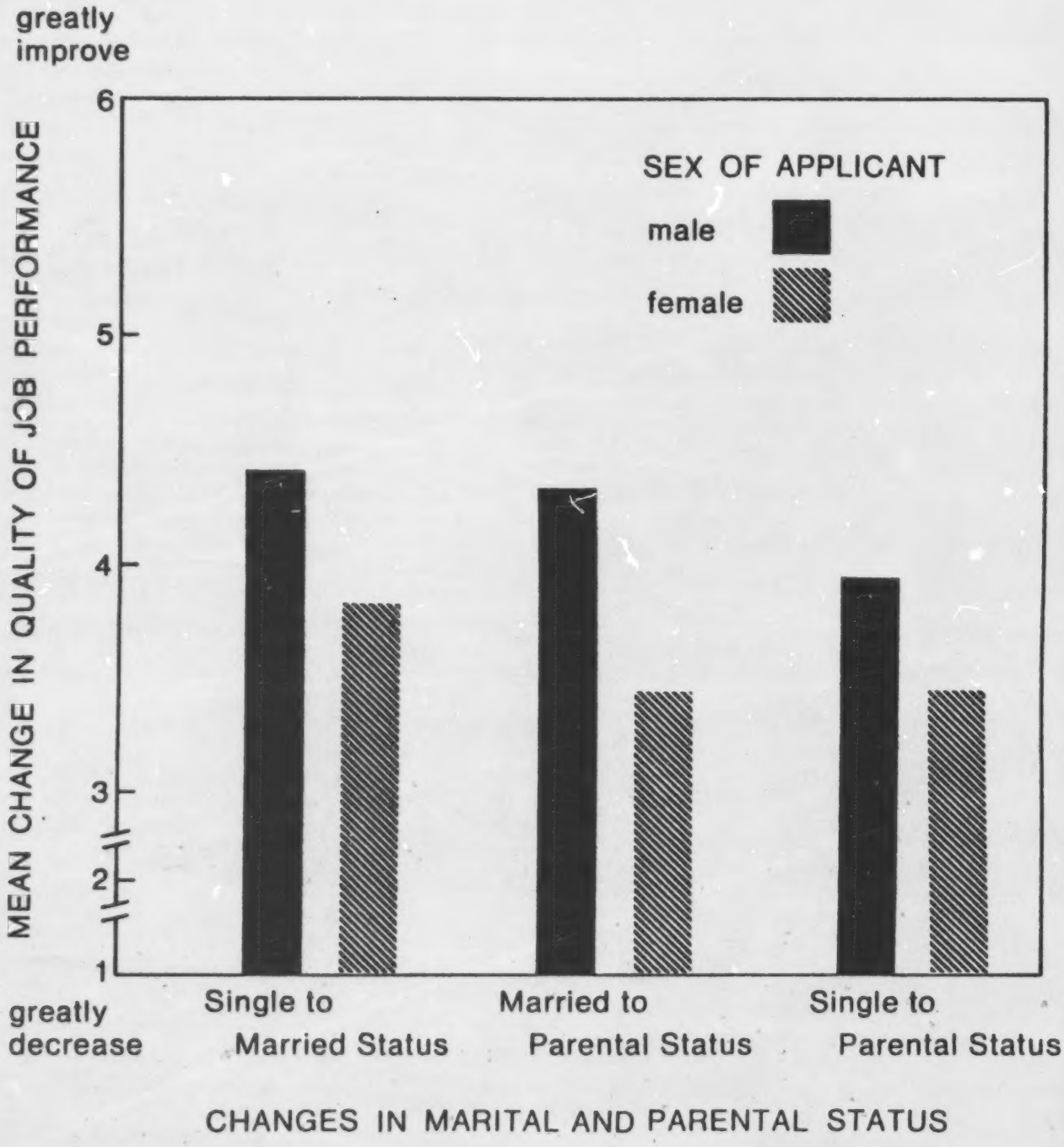
Figure Caption

Figure 1. Mean change in quality of job performance for males and females as a function of change in marital/parental status. (A rating of 3.5 on the scale indicates no change).


greatly improve
6
5
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3
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1
greatly decrease
MEAN CHANGE IN QUALITY OF JOB PERFORMANCE
SEX OF APPLICANT
male
female
Single to Married Status
Married to Parental Status
Single to Parental Status
CHANGES IN MARITAL AND PARENTAL STATUS